

Meeting Minutes
Cruise Ship Task Force
December 20, 2007
8:30 AM

Members present: Bob Bahr, Fred Cook, Chris Fogg, Anne Krieg, Mary Opdyke, Paul Paradis, Charlie Phippen, George Seavey, Greg Veilleux, and Nate Young.

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 AM.

Both Greg Gordon and Amy Powers were excused for pre-arranged vacations and weather, respectively.

The minutes were approved as presented.

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Charlie Phippen, Harbormaster, reviewed the documents that were circulated to the membership in the last packet.

Bob Bahr prepared a report which compiles the number of days with 2 ships and the number of days with over 3000 passengers on board. This table shows these numbers year to year and calculates the rate of growth.

It was noted that passenger counts do not include crew. There was discussion through the meeting on whether there was an industry standard for the number of people that generally get off a ship for a visit. There was also much discussion if the numbers are reliable to reach conclusion without this industry standard available. Using the ship's capacity or the number of people on a ship was also discussed at length. Using accurate numbers was of great concern to the members; however an average number was considered consistent and dependable by others. There was concern that the use of passenger numbers could be a loophole for ships' reservations which was followed by the note that the discussion may be too technical, that the information is readily available. Concern remained from the Chamber Director Chris Fogg that the group should be using the number of people that actually get off the ship for visits.

Ultimately, there was general agreement that a constant was needed for the group's analyses.

Other items of note in this discussion were the ratio of crew to passengers which can range from 1:2 to 1:4. It was also noted that the crew does not always go ashore. Currently there are restrictions on nationalities allowed to go on US soil; however this may change in the future.

As the group continued discussion on a possible cap, Harbormaster Phippen noted that he was reserving for 2009.

Chief Young noted that with any number of passengers, 2 ships per day is the capacity for proper management of buses and passengers on West Street by the Pier. This is a consistent impact, he noted. He also noted that after the Waterfront Master Plan was completed to plan for more bus capacity, the sizes of the buses increased dramatically enough to make the capacity study obsolete.

George Seavey moved, with a second from Mary Opdyke to recommend using the lower berth method of determining cruise ship capacity figures as this information is readily available to the Harbor Master. One opposed to the motion (Cook), all others in favor.

Chairman Paradis offered to the group that the Cruise Ship report recommended that ships carrying less than 1,000 passengers would not be counted towards a passenger cap.

Harbormaster Phippen noted that he can only anchor 2 of these types of ships in the harbor. He noted further that there is not unlimited anchorage so some caps are self-regulated. He expressed some concerns on the passenger counts. He also told the members that there are weather-related issues with allowing ships to come into the harbor.

Phippen moved, with a second from Young for discussion, to recommend that the ships occupying an anchorage (noted as A & B) should be counted in passenger caps and that ships tied to the pier should not be counted.

Discussion ensued. Chief Young questioned whether Bay Ferries would ever consider dredging and accept ships there.

Motion passed by all members present.

Chairman Paradis led the group on a discussion about seasonality.

Harbormaster Phippen noted this is already self-limiting. Primarily the smaller ships come in the summer he noted and the bigger ones in the fall. He noted there are 3 time periods: May/June, July/August and September/October. He opined that a cap should be lower in the summer in July-August than in the other periods.

Bob Bahr noted that the fall is still busy with visitors.

The group discussed the following seasons' time frames:

May 1-June 30

July 1-August 31

September 1-October 31

Harbormaster Phippen continued to note that lobstermen lose a lot of ocean floor to these ships and that they need to get back to these areas in the late fall/early winter while they can. He also noted that most of the seasonal businesses close at the end of October. He noted more firmly that weather plays a factor in the ships that visit in the late fall.

Bob Bahr countered to say that the town is trying to strengthen and extend the shoulder season so he questioned if limiting the ships' season is in conflict with this goal.

Chamber Director Chris Fogg agreed and questioned whether the ships' captains know whether it is safe or not to travel here.

Harbormaster Phippen stated that his primary concern in his capacity is safety. Late October is a very bad time for ocean travel. He allowed a November booking this year and would not consider the same again. He stated emphatically that is irresponsible to entice ocean travel after October 31st.

George Seavey noted that one ship could not let passengers off because of travel this year.

Ms Opdyke agreed with Phippen that with the time change and the weather, last October onward is a bad time for a good passenger experience.

Director Fogg noted to the group that if the town wants year round business then they need to encourage all business.

Phippen noted again that there were 10 cancellations last year in October because of high winds.

Chief Young noted that ships will cancel regardless of their reservation if the weather is bad anyway – the season is already controlled and governed by the weather.

Phippen remained firm that November is a dangerous month to be traveling by sea. He also noted these shoulder seasons can harm the passenger experience. He stated that the month of May is equally difficult as November because of high winds and bad weather conditions.

George Seavey agreed that there are passenger complaints when the weather is bad.

Bob Bahr questioned if this is a discussion the group should have with the industry. If it's self-regulated within the industry, that is, if they are not filling a ship in November, then the discussion is moot.

Chris Fogg moved to recommend the use May 1st thru June 30 as the spring season and July 1 thru August 31 for the summer season. (The motion was silent as to dates for the fall season.) The motion was seconded by George Seavey and unanimously approved.

Anne Krieg moved, with a second from Bob Bahr, to table discussion on the dates of the fall season in order to obtain feedback from the industry.

In discussion, Harbormaster Phippen continued to express concern on seeking this input. He felt strongly that the Town needs to take the lead. He expressed further concern that the lobstermen would not be able to get into these waters until the ships are gone. The ships' routes mess up the lobstermen's gear and their effect is felt island wide as their routes to get up to Bar Harbor modify according to their schedules for arrival. He does not want to defeat efforts to establish ships' routes to manage their arrival.

Krieg noted that if the industry is interested in going into November for visits, then the Town needs to decide if we will allow that or not; but if the industry has no interest in visiting here in November, then the discussion is moot.

The motion passed 6:3 with dissensions from Fogg, Phippen and Seavey.

Chairman Paradis led a discussion on passenger caps.

George Seavey noted the projections found in the Study on page 68 should be reviewed.

After discussion, Phippen moved that the recommended cap should be based upon the number of passengers on the ship and not the number of ships per day. The motion was seconded by Young and all were in favor of the motion.

Self-regulation of this number was again noted.

Chief Young returned to his early discussion on the Bay Ferries' schedule. He questioned whether the Town could contact them to split up the tenders on the days when there are a larger numbers of passengers. He felt the buses could be coordinated and a drop-off in the downtown area could still be provided. He noted the landing would be more secure there and the Town would be adding capacity to the number of people we could accommodate.

Mary Opdyke noted that the buses are private companies and there would have to be some negotiation.

Timing of the Cat and the arrival of ships' tenders were noted. The Cat leaves at 8 Am and tenders commence their arrivals between 7 to 9 AM.

George Seavey noted that the downtown business would not be happy with this idea since visitors could not easily walk into town from the Ferry Terminal.

Chairman Paradis concluded the discussion, noting that it should be revisited in the future.

Bob Bahr returned to the discussion on passenger caps. He noted that there are 3 ships in use that exceed 3,000 passengers now. There are 3 ships exceeding 3,000 and 5 ships exceeding 5,000 under construction. This information was found in the Cruise Ship Study.

Chief Young opined that the Town should allow for larger numbers in the fall. On September 5, 2007, the Explorer of the Seas and the Norwegian were both visiting on the same day. The passenger number was 5,110. He again noted that this is the saturation point for the safest and most convenient management of passengers and buses on the Pier.

Chief Young moved, with a second from Seavey to recommend a cap of 5500 passenger per day for the spring and the fall time periods.

This motion was discussed at length.

Bob Bahr noted that would mean we are allowing only one “mega-ship” or 2 large ships. He also noted that there will be and have been more days in the fall season that are this saturated. This daily occurrence in the fall could be seen as too much, he noted further.

Chief Young noted that this number could escalate in the future if our infrastructure to accommodate more passengers ashore was expanded. He felt strongly that right now 5500 is the maximum number we can serve given our capacity on the Pier and from current private sources.

Seavey felt some authority to allow or disallow ships should remain with the Harbormaster.

The motion passed ultimately unanimously.

Phippen made a motion, with a second from Young, to recommend a cap of 3500 passenger per day in the summer period.

Discussion ensued regarding operations on the 4th of July. Both Young and Phippen noted this is self-regulated. There is a required safety zone which would disallow tender operations. Also, the Pier parking lot is blocked for the day as is Agamont Lane.

Seavey noted that according to the report, 10 ships are being built to 3700 passenger capacities. He questioned whether we should increase our cap to allow these ships.

Harbormaster Phippen amended his motion to recommend allowance of 3500 passengers per day plus or minus 200 at the Harbormaster's discretion for the summer season. Young agreed to the amendment. The motion as amended passed unanimously.

Krieg moved to table discussion of Item VI.a.ii.2. to the next meeting. Young seconded the motion. All in favor.

It was noted that fees will also be on the next agenda.

Chairman Paradis discussed briefly with the members about the future for tendering facilities. He posed the questions of can we meet the requisite security requirements for a facility and how much would it cost.

The members wanted to see if funds could be made available for further study.

Harbormaster Phippen noted that before 9/11/01, the Town had invested in float improvements to receive tenders.

Bob Bahr noted that this type of knowledge of history would be beneficial to their work and asked for it to be placed on the next agenda. There was agreement from the members for this future discussion to be included next month.

Bay Ferries was discussed again. It was noted that this facility is not town-owned thus not under the town's control. It was questioned whether we should investigate this facility to ask what their future plans are for scheduling and usage. The Police Chief offered to coordinate with the owner.

George Seavey stated that the Town needs a plan if Harbor Place goes away. The Harbormaster agreed, noting that a building is not necessary for the requisite level of security.

The group briefly discussed a per passenger fee system.

Bob Bahr noted he will be absent for both January meetings for medical reasons.

January 10, 2008 is the next meeting date. Packets will be available and distributed or mailed as requested on January 4, 2008.

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 AM.

Minutes prepared on January 3, 2008 by Anne Krieg, Planning Director and Secretary to the Task Force.